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JCP confirms six additional PHC judges

Extends tenure of four others; PTI representatives skip commission's sitting

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) on Wednesday recommended the confirmation of six additional judges of the Peshawar High Court (PHC), while extending the tenure of four other additional judges for a further six months.

Presided over by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, the commission met at the conference room of the Supreme Court to make recommendations regarding the confirmation of additional judges as permanent judges of the PHC.

By a majority of its total membership, the JCP recommended the confirmations after due consideration of the relevant data forms, antecedents and evaluation of material placed before it.

The judges confirmed as permanent judges are Justice Muhammad Tariq Afridi, Justice Abdul Fayaz, Justice Salahuddin, Justice Sadiq Ali, Justice Syed Mudasser Ameer and Justice Qazi Jawad Ehsanullah.

Similarly, by a majority of its total membership, the commission recommended the extension of tenure for six months of four additional judges of the PHC, namely Justice Farah Jamshed, Justice Inamullah Khan, Justice Sabitullah Khan and Justice Aurangzeb.

PTI representatives Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Senator Barrister Syed Ali Zafar as well as Law Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Aftab Alam Afridi did not attend.

On Thursday, the JCP will meet again to consider the confirmation of 13 additional judges of the Lahore High Court.

In a separate development, the CJP, who is also president of the advisory board of the Al-Mizan Foundation, presided over a high-level meeting to review the ongoing projects spearheaded by the foundation.

The meeting was attended by retired Justice Mushir Alam, former judge of the Supreme Court and chairman of the administration committee; retired Justice Muhammad Tariq Abbasi, vice chairman; and the secretary of the Al-Mizan Foundation.

The meeting focused on reviewing the foundation's welfare mandate and its alignment with sound policy, governance and financial sustainability. Established in 1995 as a welfare institution, the Al-Mizan Foundation provides structured support to serving and retired judges of the district judiciary, court staff and their families, including dependants of deceased beneficiaries.

The foundation operates under a defined governance framework to ensure transparency, accountability and long-term institutional viability.

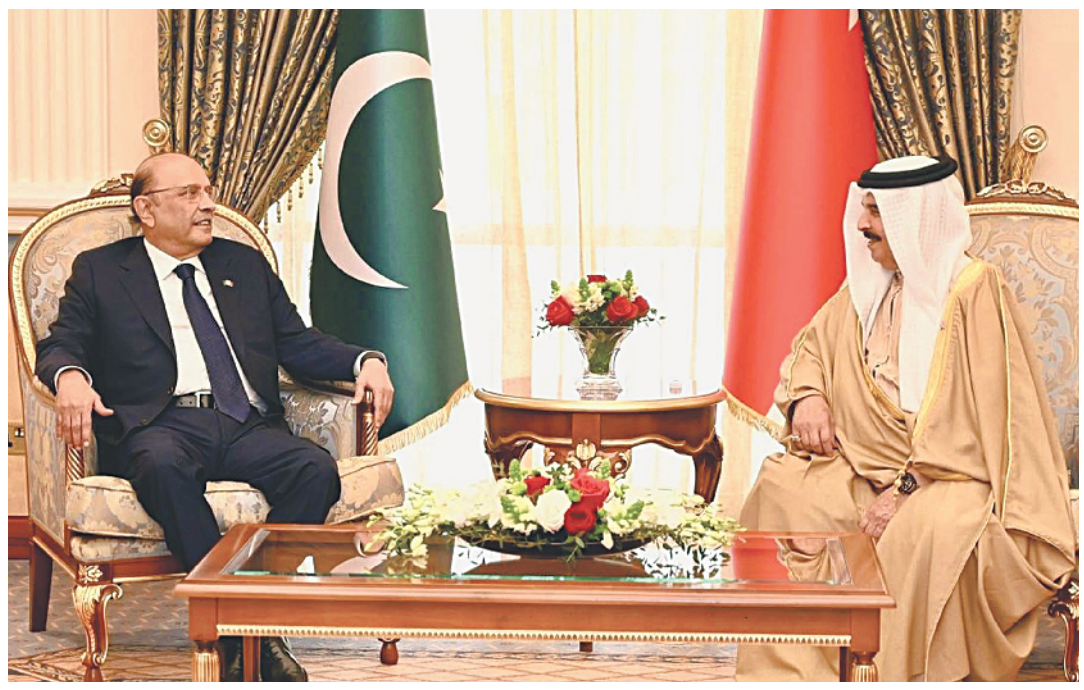
The forum deliberated on key policy and administrative issues affecting the effective delivery of welfare services, including asset management, contractual and legal arrangements, financial compliance and taxation matters.

Particular emphasis was placed on adopting sustainable policy solutions to optimise the use of institutional assets and to ensure that welfare initiatives — especially in the sectors of health, education and employee facilitation —remain resilient, efficient and responsive to emerging needs.

The CJP also expressed appreciation for the forward-looking leadership of retired Justice Mushir Alam, noting that his stewardship has significantly strengthened the governance, policy coherence and institutional integrity of the Al-Mizan Foundation.

He also commended the contribution of Zia-ur-Rehman, the incumbent secretary of the foundation, for his professional diligence, administrative competence and reform-oriented approach.

It was acknowledged that the clarity of vision and disciplined oversight during this phase of institutional consolidation have contributed meaningfully to enhancing the foundation's credibility, responsiveness and long-term sustainability as a welfare institution.



MANAMA: President Asif Ali Zardari meets King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain at Al-Qudaibiya Palace.—PPI

FCC hints at closing Arshad Sharif case

Court cites 'slow investigation', MLA agreement with Kenya

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Wednesday hinted at closing the ongoing suo motu proceedings initiated to seek an independent and transparent probe into the murder of journalist Arshad Sharif.

"We will make an appropriate order and may seek assistance from the parties if needed," observed Justice Aamer Farooq, adding that the major issue before the court was how to proceed further in the matter.

Justice Farooq was heading a two-judge FCC bench hearing the case, which was initially taken up suo motu by the Supreme Court.

Earlier, the case was heard by a five-member SC bench in December 2022.

However, following the passage of the 26th Constitutional Amendment, it was first transferred to a six-member constitutional bench of the SC and later to the FCC after the 27th Constitutional Amendment.

Arshad Sharif was shot in the head when Kenyan police opened fire on his car on the outskirts of Nairobi on Oct 23, 2022. He had left Pakistan in August 2022 after multiple sedition cases were registered against him in different cities.

On Wednesday, the FCC expressed its intention to close the proceedings after Additional Attorney General (AAG) Chaudhry Aamir Rehman informed the court that a Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) agreement had been signed between the governments of Pakistan and Kenya in September last year. He added that a request had already been sent for the Special Joint Investigation Team (SJIT), constituted specifically for the probe, to visit the crime scene.

The AAG recalled that the SJIT's report had already been submitted to the court, adding that the Kenyan government had initially refused to assist in the investigation.

The law officer explained that the government would dispatch the SJIT once the Kenyan government allowed it to inspect the crime scene for further investigation. He added that the team would probe the journalist's murder based on the evidence provided by the Kenyan government.

'Slow investigation'

Justice Farooq observed that there was a difference in the manner in which the government and the court approached the matter, adding that the investigation process had been slow, though blame could not be placed on anyone.

He questioned what further action the court could take now that a legal assistance agreement between the two countries had been signed.

During the hearing, the murder of MQM leader Imran Farooq in the United Kingdom was also referenced, with Justice Farooq recalling how Pakistani and British police jointly investigated that case.

However, the AAG argued that the nature of the Imran Farooq murder case was quite different than that of Arshad Sharif, adding that two suspects had already been nominated in the journalist's murder.

He further stated that both the nominated suspects were still in Kenya and Pakistan had issued red notices through Interpol for their arrest and repatriation for further investigation.

The law officer said investigation on part of the investigating agencies in Pakistan has been completed for now. He also recalled that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had spoken with Kenyan President William Ruto on the phone about Arshad Sharif's murder case in 2022.

AJK abolishes seven posts of secretaries

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government has abolished seven secretary-level posts to fulfil an agreement with the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee seeking a reduction in administrative expenditures.

According to a handout issued by the Press Information Department on Wednesday, the abolition was approved by the cabinet at its meeting on Dec 17 last year as part of administrative reforms aimed at austerity and improving the efficiency of the official machinery.

The abolished posts include secretary of transport; secretary of population welfare; secretary of disaster management and civil defence; secretary of tourism and archaeology; secretary of religious affairs and auqaf; secretary of (ex-officio) environmental protection agency; and secretary of information technology.

During the tenure of former prime minister Sardar Tanveer Ilyas, several separate secretary-level posts were created even for departments with fewer than 100 regular budgeted employees, placing an additional burden on the exchequer.

His successor, Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, who frequently spoke of austerity measures during his tenure, did not abolish those posts and instead elevated as many as 10 civil servants to the rank of secretary.

Subsequently, the number of local officers — mostly from the AJK Administrative Service, Law Department and Secretariat Group — holding the status of secretaries to government, including the Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR), and secretaries to the president and the prime minister, rose to 26.

Of them, two were currently serving against non-secretary posts and four had been declared as 'surplus secretaries.'—Tariq Naqash

JI's four-day referendum on Punjab local govt law begins today

By Bakhtawar Mian

ISLAMABAD: Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan will launch a four-day public referendum beginning on Thursday (today) to gauge public opinion on the Punjab Local Government Act, JI emir Hafiz Naeemur Rehman announced.

Speaking at the press conference on Wednesday, JI chief said that an independent and transparent referendum process had been arranged under the supervision of autonomous referendum commissions at central and district levels.

He said that millions of people would participate after which a schedule for surrounding the Punjab Assembly would be announced in the light of public opinion.

Mr Rehman said the referendum would continue for four days, with camps set up at intersections, markets, educational institutions and other public places. He noted that the printing of ballot papers was complete and all arrangements were finalised to ensure transparency.

PR faces rising number of locomotive failures

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways is facing a rising number of locomotive failures largely due to an aging fleet, with more than 63 per cent of its engines having surpassed two decades in service, officials told the National Assembly Standing Committee on Railways on Wednesday.

The committee was informed by the Railways ministry officials that despite the growing strain on rolling stock, corrective measures including improved maintenance, modernisation plans, and enhanced funding are underway to stabilise operations and improve passenger services.

The officials also shared with the committee plans for the overhauling and modernisation of diesel-electric locomotives.

The committee meeting, chaired by Ramesh Lal, was further briefed on the availability of passenger coaches in Pakistan Railways, and it was clarified that the shortage of coaches faced since June 2025 has largely been overcome through improved efficiency of workshops and the restoration of under-repair coaches.

The availability of coaches has increased from 1,016 in September 2025 to 1,105, against a requirement of 1,100, and the requirement is expected to reach 1,150 by June 2026.

The committee was further informed that Pakistan Railways achieved record passenger earnings of Rs48.832 billion during fiscal year 2024-25, while earnings during the first six months of the current fiscal year have shown a 7 per cent increase compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

Secretary of Pakistan Railways briefed the committee in detail on issues relating to the restructuring and outsourcing of various sections of PR with a view to improving efficiency and enhancing passenger services. Following the briefing, the committee constituted a sub-committee to further examine the matters.

Regarding service quality, the committee reviewed the issue of non-functional air-conditioning units in passenger coaches. It was stated that failures have increased due to overaged AC units; however, the replacement process is underway.

Delay in Punjab poll-related activities dismays ECP

Commission decides to rehear the matter; finds response of KP CM's aide unsatisfactory

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Dismayed by the failure of the Punjab government to meet the timelines for various activities required to pave the way for the conduct of local government (LG) elections in the province, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided to once again take up for hearing the matter of the long-delayed electoral exercise.

The assurance to complete the prerequisites for LG polls had been given to the Commission in October last year by the Punjab chief secretary, who had himself provided the timelines. Informed sources told *Dawn* that under the promised schedule, the Punjab Local Government (Delimitation of Union Councils) Rules were to be finalised by Oct 27; however, a formal notification is still awaited.

They said Nov 15 was the deadline for the provision of the Punjab Local Government (Conduct of Elections) Rules. Although a draft had been shared and the ECP had already given its input, the required notification has yet to be issued. Likewise, notification of demarcation and classification showing the limits of local areas was due by Dec 22, but remains pending.

The deadline of Dec 31, set for the notification of the number of union councils to be delimited within local areas, has also been missed. Authenticated maps showing census charges, census circles and census blocks as per 2023 census were to be provided by Jan 10, but these too have not yet been received.

Sources said a letter expressing the ECP's disappointment has been sent to the Secretary, Local Government and Community Development Department, Punjab, Lahore. The letter, seen by *Dawn*, states that the matter has been discussed at the highest level and that the Commission has taken a serious view of the failure to meet the agreed timelines and fulfil the assurances given by the government.

It deplores that the matter was left open-ended, without any fresh timelines being provided for the completion of all related activities. The letter states that, keeping in view the situation and the fact that the conduct of local government elections in the province has already been considerably delayed, the ECP decided fix the matter for hearing and take appropriate steps with regard to the conduct of local government elections in Punjab. "The due date for the hearing shall be conveyed soon," the letter adds.

Under Section 219(4) of the Elections Act, the Commission is bound to hold elections to the local governments within 120 days of the expiry of the term of the local governments of a province, cantonment and the Islamabad Capital Territory. The local governments in Punjab completed their term on Dec 31, 2021, meaning that elections were required to be held by the end of April 2022.

According to Article 140A of the Constitution, each province is required by law to establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the local governments. Many view it as a failure of the ECP that it allows the spirit of the law to be defeated by last-minute changes to local government laws.

On Oct 8, 2025, the ECP had ordered LG polls to be held in December and directed Punjab to immediately start the delimitation exercise and complete it within two months. "Thereafter, the election programme should be announced, and the election should be held in the last week of December 2025. The office is expected to follow the timelines strictly," the Oct 8 order stated.

This order, however, was reversed in a meeting chaired by CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja on Tuesday, in light of the new law, following a request by the Punjab government.

KP CM's aide response unsatisfactory

The ECP has found the reply submitted by Special Assistant to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Shafiullah Jan to the notice issued to him as "unsatisfactory" and decided to fix the case for regular hearing, a source in the ECP told *Dawn*.

Earlier this month, the ECP issued a notice to Mr Jan seeking an explanation for his statement blaming the electoral body for irregularities during the Haripur by-elections last year. He had alleged that Form-47 of the by-election had been prepared in Islamabad.

Key bridge over Kurram River blown up in North Waziristan

Land link of major towns severed

By Pazir Gul

NORTH WAZIRISTAN: A bridge over the Kurram River in North Waziristan's Shewa tehsil was blown up on Wednesday.

The structure was completely destroyed, severing land links between the area and Miranshah, Bannu and other adjoining regions.

The incident has once again raised serious questions about the security situation in the North Waziristan district.

According to sources, unidentified individuals planted a large quantity of explosives beneath the bridge under the cover of darkness late at night, detonating it with a powerful blast. The explosion was heard from miles away, spreading fear and panic among residents.

A VIEW of the destroyed bridge.—Photo by the writer

Following the incident, police and security forces reached the incident site and cordoned off the area. An investigation was launched into the incident.

The destruction of the bridge has caused severe hardships for millions of residents of Shewa and surrounding areas. The destruction of the bridge — a vital line of communication in the region — is likely to cause severe hardships for the people as it served as an important route for the daily movement of civilians, patients, students, traders and government employees.

Its collapse disrupted access to healthcare facilities, supply of essential goods and routine commercial activities, forcing the region's residents to use much longer and more difficult alternative routes.

Tribal elder Malik Islam Khan and other local elders strongly condemned the incident, calling it a "heinous and cowardly act". They said such actions primarily harm innocent civilians who are already suffering due to years of insecurity and underdevelopment. They demanded immediate and strict action against those responsible.

Local sources said security forces' convoys occasionally used the route as well, leading to concerns that the attack may have been aimed at destabilising the region and undermining peace. However, according to official sources, the bridge was primarily used by civilians for relief operations and movement.

Authorities said a comprehensive investigation is underway, while a report has been sent to senior officials regarding the bridge's reconstruction and interim alternative arrangements.

Attacks on infrastructure

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has seen a rise in attacks targeting infrastructure in recent months.

On Dec 7, terrorists blew up a link bridge in the Mamandkhel area of the Bannu district using explosive material, affecting public movement in the area. Within a span of one week, North Waziristan's Mir Ali tehsil later witnessed two incidents of terrorists blowing up government schools.

November also saw two incidents of terrorists attempting to blow up bridges in Bannu. One plot was foiled by the police's bomb disposal squad, while the improvised explosive device in the other detonated prematurely, killing the attacker.